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Arrests in Kennedy Case Delayed for Months, New Orleans Prosecutor Says

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NEW ORLEANS, La., Feb. 20 — District Attorney James Garrison, who once said he was only weeks away from making arrests in the Kennedy assassination case, revised his estimate upward today to "many months."

He charged that the delay had been caused by premature publicity from local newspapers, but maintained that "there is no question there will be arrests, charges and convictions."

Arrests, Mr. Garrison said, "probably were just a few weeks away until the disclosures by the local newspapers."

"Now they are most certainly months away," he added.

As he has before, Mr. Garrison refused in a 61-minute news conference with more than 40 out-of-town newsmen to give details of what he has said was a "plot" that culminated in the shooting of President Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963.

However, a source within Mr. Garrison's office named a "suspect," but asked that his name be withheld. This source also said one theory was that President Kennedy's assassination grew out of a plot by anti-Communist forces to kill Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba. According to this theory, the conspirators planned to send Lee Harvey Oswald to Cuba to kill Premier Castro, and later decided to go after President Kennedy when Oswald was denied entry into Cuba.

Theory Is Discounted

Neither the "suspect" named by one of Mr. Garrison's employes, or the anti-Castro theory, is new, according to lawyers who served on the staff of the Warren Commission, which investigated the assassination throughout most of 1964. The commission concluded that Oswald killed President Kennedy alone and unaided.

One member of the commission's staff said that the Federal Bureau of Investigation had accumulated a "great stack" of data on the alleged New Orleans "suspect," and that the information indicated that the man had not seen Oswald in the months just before the assassination and had not been a part of any conspiracy.

Mr. Garrison discounted the investigations of the Warren Commission and the Federal Bureau of Investigation today and said that he thought that neither agency had proper "evaluation machinery" for weighing the information they had collected.

He said he was confident of obtaining convictions for conspiracy to kill the Presiddent and for "being accessories after the fact—that is, having substantial knowledge and withholding information."

He said that none of the suspects were officials of the United States Government or agents of a foreign power. He declined to elaborate.

Mr. Garrison, who has been district attorney of Jefferson Parish (County) for five years, seemed surprised by the attendance of more than two score out-of-town newsmen and cameramen. They came here after he told The Associated Press on Saturday night that he planned to make arrests in the Kennedy case.

Expresses His Regrets

When he faced the newsmen today in his first formal news conference on the assassination, he was visibly nervous, perspired freely and extended his regrets to several foreign newsmen who had traveled to New Orleans in anticipation of an immediate arrest.

Again and again, he said "no comment" to questions, and turned the news conference into an attack on the two New Orleans daily newspapers, The Times Picayune and The States-Item.

He said that he had tried to keep the investigation quiet and had been succeeding until the States-Item ran an article saying that he and his staff had spent $8,000 since October in travel expenses to carry out the investigation.

Mr. Garrison contended that articles in the two newspapers had jeopardized the life of one "witness," in jail on a burglary conviction, and would make it more difficult for him to find other witnesses.

He said he was also disturbed by an editorial in the States-Item.

"Has the District Attorney uncovered some valuable additional evidence," the editorial asked, "or is he merely saving some interesting new information that will gain for him exposure in a national magazine? Mr. Garison, it seems, should have some explantion."

Investigation Defended

Until the editorials appeared on Saturday, Mr. Garirson had been cautious about speaking publicly on his investigation into the Kennedy assassination. Then, he quickly defended his investigation and said he expected it to result in arrests.

Mr. Garrison's anger over the local newspapers seemed unabated today. He invited out-of-town newsmen to the news conference because, he said, he felt he "owed" them one conference for coming such long distances.

But he barred reporters from the two local dailies from the conference, and shifted the conference from his office to the Fontainebleu Motel so, one of his staff members said, the local reporters could not assert they had been barred from public property.

And he said that after today he would not speak about the investigation to out-of-town reporters, either, until there was a break in the case.

If a break comes, he said, he will talk first to publications and television networks "who have given us information."

Mr. Garrison declined to name them, and refused comment when asked if one publication was Life magazine.

It was known, however, that Mr. Garrison met frequently during the weekend with Mike Wallace and other C.B.S. television employes. Representatives of the network began talking to the district attorney about two weeks ago while preparing a special program on the Warren Report.

Mr. Garrison, who is 46 years old, has frequently made headlines since becoming district attorney of Jefferson Parish, which embraces New Orleans. He started a clean-up campaign of what he said was prostitution and blackmail along Bourbon Street here. This touched off bitter protests from the Bourbon Street businessmen.

But he was praised by the States-Item, which said, "maybe we got us a real honest, crusading district attorney."

Mr. Garrison also tangled with eight criminal court judges, who, he charged, were acting "like the sacred cows of India" in refusing to give him funds to carry out his investigation of Bourbon Street.

The judges sued him for defamation of character and he was ultimately fined $1,000. Mr. Garrison appealed to the United States Supreme Court and won.